

here civilization ceased

debts

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thank you.

the cover was drawn by
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let's ride bikes...

here civilization ceased
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this hierarchy ain't gonna topple itself.
let's begin.

places

At the sound of the whistle, we jumped up, grabbing our packs and containers of water, and walked to a spot next to the tracks. It was late summer, a brisk afternoon, and our idea was to catch the highline, the Burlington-Northern train originating in Portland pulling a string of high-priority freight non-stop to Minneapolis - ideally with us hidden in one of the cars. We were hopefully to eventually make our way to New York, Captain Joyce Leslie wanted to live there for the winter, and I just wanted a cross-county adventure.

It was that time of the year when summer was beginning to fade into autumn. It was visible in the empty lots throughout the neighborhood where, like the people in this city who are ghostly white the other nine months of the year, the leaves on the trees had been bronzed following the last three months of sun. You could feel it, the mild chill of evening no longer waited for dusk, but would creep into the city before the sun even touched the treetop horizon which crowned the West Hills. Though at this time of year, the blackberry bushes are lush with berries, and it was these bushes which lined the edge of the trainyard, concealing us from the road and from the yardworkers, and also staining our fingers a velvet hue of purple as we picked every berry we could find while waiting for our train.

Then we heard the whistle...

Growing up, I lived in a city that was built around a stretch of railroad tracks extending east from Los Angeles. All Burlington-Northern railroad traffic between LA and San Diego to the south or San Bernardino to the east would run along these tracks. Amtrak also uses these rails - I can tell you because I've taken the Amtrak southbound, though I can't tell you if they also head east, as no one I know has ever paid money to end up in San Bernardino. I lived close enough to the tracks that at night, when everything else was quiet, I could hear the trains passing through. I could even feel the vibrations of the wheels passing over the switch in the track where two sections of rail are joined. The whistles of

trains throughout the night became soothing, a comforting accompaniment to nights spent listening to the oldies radio station, or just lying in bed staring out my window. Years passed - 18 of them before I left - but the train whistles were always there. Sporadic times throughout the night, but never absent. It's still a sound I love to hear.

I stepped out of the bushes and saw the first unit, a northbound on the main track. This was ours.

We had our packs on, wiping the sticky blackberry residue from our hands, waiting.

The train approached, but when it came close, we saw that it was traveling way too fast to catch. Three units flew by, followed by car after car of double-stacked trailers. We stood within feet of the train, close enough to feel the wind from each passing car. Our timing was nearly perfect - we had gotten to the yard about twenty minutes before our train went through, which is all you could hope for being that freight trains really have no precise schedule. The only problem was that we were too far up in the yard, that the trains had accelerated to a speed that we had no hope of trying to catch.

The final car passed while we could only stand and watch, still holding onto our packs and bottles of water. I stepped onto the track to watch the train speed farther and farther away until it finally disappeared around a curve in the distance.

Like I said, freight trains have no definite schedules, and if there's one thing you need when riding trains, it's patience. Actually it's water, but patience is a close second. How many times I've had to sit in trainyards, wait beneath bridges or sleep inside lone boxcars, waiting for hours, whole nights sometimes, for something headed in my direction. And even then, I've been sidelined and abandoned by the units, or have had my train break up somewhere along the way, leaving me stuck, tired and lost, a disoriented stranger wandering somewhere between point A and point B. I've been escorted out of yards, citation in pocket, in the back seat of yard-patrol's SUV's, and had to endure sitting in the rain hoping something would come soon. And even then... a train may be traveling too fast to catch, or have no cars where it would be



As for Orange County, it appears less and less idealistic everytime I see it. Consumed, it seems, by its own assets. I can't say I'll be too depressed the day that I hear it falls into the ocean. Last I heard, lemons had replaced oranges as the county's most abundant crop.

Rip it up!

possible to conceal yourself, or may very obviously not be going to the destination you are hoping to get to. On freights, arriving anywhere on time is as hopeless as expecting a warm comfortable ride.

The thing is, it is all these factors that give trains a certain type of romance. It's a game of wits and patience, and a couple parts chance, and if you lose, the consequences may be serious, but if you win, your efforts do not go unrewarded. You'll travel through areas where others can't go, lands isolated by geography, property claims, and tunnels and trestles constructed solely for railroad passing. The wind will run through your hair, and the sunlight will flutter upon your eyelids. It's a sense of vertigo, a symphony of sound and rhythm. You have a respect for distance, unlike air travel which makes it invisible, or car travel which makes it monotonous and ugly. The past is left behind at 50 miles an hour, and on those occasions where you end up where you wanted to go, success gleams across your lips. And on those times that you don't... well...

What now, we wondered. The day was cooling off, and the sky was streaked its setting-sun canopy of steel orange. We sat back down, what else could you do? Ahh, that familiar taste of blackberries and anticipation. We shared stories of past rides, and past times in New York, and how, despite the wait, trains sure did beat the hell out of going Greyhound.

It wasn't long, though, before we heard the hissing of brakes on another train that had been sitting in the yard, still and quiet until now. We agreed that if the train made any northward movements, we'd hop on. And soon enough, it did. We found a grainer and crawled inside.

Motion.

The train gasped a series of creaks and moans, like the morning stretching of slumbering limbs. Louder and more constant as we slowly accelerated.

Stop.

A brake-check? Inside we sat quiet and alert while outside twilight settled all around us.

Reverse.

By the time we decided we should wait in the outskirts again until we could figure out when this train was doing, we were already traveling too fast to jump off.

Motion.

We were now headed east. Signs of urbanism becoming fewer and fewer until only our train and a quiet two-lane highway were visible amongst the trees beneath the nighttime sky.

"We flew on the wings of the wind... annihilating 'time and space'."

The railroad was the introduction of steady mechanical motion, the creation of the sensation that the landscape was floating across one's field of vision. This journal entry was written in 1830 by a first-time passenger - racing along at speeds of 15 to 25 miles per hour.

With flashlight and map, I determined that we were en route to Spokane, Washington. A route which took us along the north bank of the Columbia River.

The railroad made transcontinental travel possible, opening new doorways for communication and transportation. A town once content with surviving on its own production could now transport its crops to more densely populated centers, and industry now had new markets wherever the rails could reach. Along the rails, towns sprang up on land which had only years before remained untouched. Tunnels were carved and bridges built. Clocks across the continent were standardized to the pulse of the steam locomotives. Civilization blossomed, and the industrial revolution had hurled man into worlds which could hardly have been imagined only years before.

This was the future. The railroad had borne civilization.

people and the physical environment. I find myself returning to visit friends and family every now and then. I guess there haven't been any drastic changes, just what can be called more of the same. Disneyland has built a new theme park, there are new freeways, and more often than not there is at least one beach which is closed due to pollution. The growing number of strip malls and gated communities seems to be taking place at the highest rate that developers can move into the wetlands and canyons, trying to create room for the population which still increases consistently each year, conditions which stem from and simultaneously undermine that well oiled suburban utopian machine. As for that subculture I once fit in with, I honestly don't know how it's doing. I've grown up a bit too. What was me, in the past, traversing the city with a skateboard and my hair in liberty spikes has progressed into a bicycle and a walkman with a Baugles cassette, though the days of roaming the streets in bands of kids tweaked on speed or drunk on cheap liquor are all but completely gone. It wasn't until I moved away and traveled a bit that I realized how it was not a universal normality that about half of everyone 17 years old has a kid or has had multiple pregnancies.

Occasionally I'll run into an old friend, who, more often than not, will refer to those days as a phase in their life, and will then usually begin to tell me about their job and their partner and their apartment. I'll walk down streets in my old neighborhood, a residential area which never seems to change, where faded spraypaint and hazy memories mark the paths I've taken through years past. I realize that I'm a totally different person now, and I miss those days, though I know I can't go back to them. I wouldn't want to. But at the same time, I don't want to embrace the lifestyle that our drunken nights, evenings we spent having fun on our terms, were rebelling against.

I'm glad I've had the opportunity to experience so much outside of the social bubble of southern California, and definitely happy that I no longer live there, but I'm also glad that I haven't abandoned that youthful energy and recklessness which OC taught me, that lust for adrenaline and the taste of danger that comes with pushing the limits. And I'm glad to say that trouble still seems to follow me, wherever I go.

I can't say that I ever sought out the lifestyle. It's just that the sterility of schools and work never really interested me. Orange County can't be topped in terms of recreational shopping malls, movie theaters and amusement parks, it's just that all of this passive entertainment just seemed so sterile to me. I looked for the other aspects the county had to offer. It was this arena which saw me spending my evenings drinking cheap malt liquor literally in the shadow of Disneyland. Where at age 15 I was having conversations with the prostitutes and car stereo thieves who would hang out in the same fields and parking lots as us, who bought our beer for us since we were too young, then told us of the last few days' happenings while we sat around amidst broken bottles in abandoned lots sipping our Mickey's and Cisco. It was hardly uncommon for us to end up looking for some way to break the monotony of suburban life, and I have plenty of memories of footchases, rushing through bushes, across busy streets, over barbwire fences, desperately and drunkenly trying to get away from motel owners, security guards, and members of various police departments, usually for reasons involving smashed windows, objects ending up in swimming pools, shooting off fireworks, or beer runs, but some of the funnier ones I remember are attempting to paint the entire interior of a McDonalds with ketchup, throwing bottles from a 15th story hotel balcony, and utterly destroying a couple hotel rooms.

It seemed we hardly had to try, that trouble had a way of finding us. Rather than going to school, I'd spend my mornings at the beach, in a park or a friend's garage waking up to a tequila sunrise. And alcohol and assorted drugs combined with the late night streets of downtown always offered more interesting possibilities than homework.

It turned out that it wasn't a party for everyone, as every now and then word of another friend choosing death, or stumbling accidentally into it, gets around. It would take more fingers than I have to keep track of all the people I know who are now dead or seriously fucked up due to these tendencies. Friends who hung themselves, shot themselves in the face, overdosed, flipped their cars, etc.

I'm a bit older now, and I moved out of Orange County a couple years ago. I just couldn't handle the superficiality of the

The Captain and I crawled out of our steel compartments and stood on the porch of the grainer. Occasionally, we would pass a lone house with it's windows lit up. It was a strange intersection of lives - possibly a family sitting to dinner, or a couple explaining their day's events to each other, meanwhile, the two of us appeared, and just as quickly disappeared, from their world, unknown to them, perceptible only as a passing train whistle in the night.

Lives were forever changed. Civilization was refined. Industry grew. Businesses consolidated. The "annihilation of time and space" was pushed farther with the automobile, the radio, the space shuttle, the internet. The railroad was no exception to the new rules.

The new world would make the 'floating landscape' an everyday occurrence. Today, no continent lies untouched. The dreams and myths of yesterday are mapped and plotted out today, pinned to grade school walls and offered as trivia in TV game shows.

This was the future. Civilization had all but suffocated the railroad.

This was the future.

And then even the highway disappeared, and we were left alone, steadfast on our eastbound route, sharing the night with the blanket of stars which had appeared in the sky. Millions of them, who come out of hiding away from the city. We rode on the edge of the Columbia Gorge. Beneath us the river, whose surface mirrored the constellations above. Pockets of lights came and went on the opposite bank, rural homes resting quietly on the flowing landscape, following us for a moment before disappearing into the land.

Worlds come and go, estates at every stage of wealth and decay line the rails. In a day, you can pass towns of lone dirt roads and weathered grain elevators. Seemingly vast landscapes of pristine oceans and mountains and plains, or find yourself riding hour after hour through dense sprawling metropolises. And with the absence of the tape deck or the inflight movie, you are captive to the scenery, to

the beauty and immensity of the world that exists outside of your own. A world which existed long before human history and will flourish long after.

And I was struck by the depth of the world around me. The stars which the city had taught me to forget now stretched out above me, boundless. Light millions of years old, passing through the atmosphere on this summer evening, and me, hanging onto the ladder of a freight train taking me in the wrong direction - a chance encounter between two travelers. These are the meetings that change worlds, but that history books always neglect.

There was no windscreen separating me from the world. Each field and evergreen we passed left a scent which lingered around us before being taken away with the wind. Clocks hung on the walls of a thousand buildings that this train would pass, but here and now, there was no time. Whistles from the units were greeted with a silent response. Trees and grass rustled in the wind, the crystalline river below us weaves its way toward the ocean. A path shaped by the evolution of continents, and still evolving silently, tirelessly, as we looked on. The solitude was encapsulating. Chemical and chaos. And at that moment, it made no difference that I was heading the wrong way. Even had all our plans gone perfectly, we couldn't have hoped for a night like this. And I remembered why I love riding trains. Despite the waiting, the risk of being arrested, the occasions of being abandoned in some small out-of-the-way town, if you caught a train, you knew that you were leaving your world behind, and that new worlds waited somewhere at the end of the track. And if your train made an unexpected turn... well... Like I said, trains are for those seeking adventure, not punctuality. I was now heading for one of these unforeseen worlds. Leaving the past behind at 70 miles an hour, and life had just become a bit more interesting.

venues, restaurants, malls and parks. Orange County has it all, and more than likely, has several of them.

What you're unlikely to hear about is the vertigo that comes from living in such manicured conditions. After all, Disneyland is hardly the only planned community. Entire cities such as Irvine and Mission Viejo are still privately owned and were built as planned communities. The high cost-of-living in Orange County makes for conditions where it is not unusual for people well into their 20's to still be living with their parents. Orange County is suburbia epitomized, and with this comes all of the suburban angst and conditions which stem from, and simultaneously undermine the utopian concepts of the county.

The general affluence, combined with the year-round beautiful weather, miles of beaches, and abundance of clubs make the conditions perfect for constant parties and the accompanying hedonism being the norm, embedded into the very culture of the county. And it starts young.

Where at the age of 17, I awoke in a hospital bed due to alcohol poisoning. Over time I found out that this is hardly an infrequent occurrence amongst people I knew, but the majority who this had also happened too were even younger than me. Today, I have more than a few friends (to put it modestly) who are in drug and alcohol rehab programs, and I'm still not even old enough to legally drink.

The county lies within a 90 minute drive of both Los Angeles and San Diego, and is a modest drive from the debauch of Las Vegas and Mexico - the latter was a popular place for my friends and I to ditch school and visit, where a high school ID and a half-assed explanation granted us entrance to bars and clubs. The liquor stores never bothered checking ID's and carrying drugs and alcohol back over the border was only too easy. Our close proximity to these metropolises of vice meant that there was always anything you could imagine floating around or happening somewhere nearby. It's not that the kids grow up faster here, but that they don't grow up at all.

Orange County lies in a plateau stretching along the southern California coast between Los Angeles and San Diego. Created from a rural fringe of Los Angeles, this land became its own county in 1889, and make no mistake, Orange County and LA are two distinctly separate environments. Growing up in north Orange County, my public-school education on the history of the area presented an image of a fertile farm community - including the area's most abundant crop, oranges - though this region is naturally a desert and could not exist in its modern form without pumping water in from across the state.

It was in the early 1950's, with orange groves still dominating the landscape, that Walt Disney bought a parcel of land in the city of Anaheim and transformed the orchards into Disneyland, the spark which would ignite a conflagration of industrial development throughout the region. Around this same time, LA was growing and property was becoming increasingly costly and scarce. Orange County advertised modern housing, rural open space, high-quality schools and a temperate climate, along with cheaper space away from the gridlock and glamour of LA. This attracted residents and industry, particularly aircraft firms.

Within 30 years, the county was home to internationally operating aerospace firms including Boeing, Northrop, Hughes, and McDonnell Douglas, making this industry one of the county's top employers. Around the 1980's these manufacturers made a general move away from aircraft and into missile and weapons systems technologies. Today, the county exists within a grid of 12-lane freeways and is the home to the corporate headquarters of corporations such as Taco Bell, Wendy's, Carl's Jr, and Kimberly Clark, maintaining an economy of over \$60 billion a year, the 10th largest county economy in the nation.

Today if you were to look into the advertised aspects of the county, you would hear of decentralized business districts, year-round sun, and plenty of recreational opportunities including beaches, amusement parks, professional sports teams, concert

I awoke on a hill of grass and leaves amidst a sky of a thousand hidden birds chirping. The tall lanky trees which last night stood silhouetted before a moist gray horizon appeared a dense forest of eucalyptus trees beneath a morning sky clouded with fog. The smell of eucalyptus surrounded me... eucalyptus and my own damp sleeping bag.

I looked at the piece I tore from the newspaper last night. The Anarchist Bookfair begins at 10 this morning. Then I realized that waking up like this - amongst trees and mosquitoes rather than clock radios and central heating - hardly gives a person an accurate sense of time. So I hopped on my bike and rode through the Presidio to a spot overlooking the Pacific Ocean, my first view of it in nearly six months, a depressingly long amount of time for someone who spent the bulk of their life so close to the beach and enjoys the feel of warm sand and the sound of crashing waves possibly more than anything else.

So I say that it was the bookfair that brought me to San Francisco, but, really, the bookfair was mostly just an excuse to quit my job and spend some time in warmer climates, as I can't say that this last winter in Portland can be reminisced upon as being all that exciting. Nearly six straight months of biting rain and numbing cold and employment isn't my idea of a party. I think the only positive outcome has been the new wave songs I've learned how to play on my keyboard. Anyway, a while back I decided to haul my bike with me down to San Francisco for the weekend, and then attempt to ride down to Southern California. More or less the same coastal route I've ridden once previously, though this time would be much less of a rush. On my last ride, I had gone from San Francisco to Orange County in five days. This time my only deadline was to be in Ventura, a coastal city just north of Los Angeles County, in two weeks for the reservation I made to spend my birthday on an island off the southern California coast.

California's central coast is a potpourri of landscapes. A fusion of ecosystems where tractors plow miles of fields on palisades whose edges crumble into the breaking waves of the Pacific Ocean, mountains that border beaches and unconquerable redwood forests that continually uplift and eat away at the meager roadwork which the roadbuilders have managed to lay down. A convergence of creatures who make their homes on the land, beneath the water, and in the skies, whose varied features radiate a wider range of color than even the most imaginative painter's palate. Skylines stretch into eternity unobstructed by anything, with the occasional exception of masts belonging to fishing boats in the distance.

Along this stretch of coast, cloudy skies and cool moist air dominate the calendar, and adapting to the rhythm of time in this land takes nothing more than removing your wristwatch and throwing it to the depths of the Pacific Ocean.

Traveling by one's self possesses its share of negative qualities. Safety is the first that comes to mind, and not having someone to smile with upon seeing a rock covered with frolicking harbor seals or after walking out of a Safeway with a carton of chocolate soy milk in your pants is the second. But on this trip I made no attempt to invite anyone, and I was awaiting the time when I would have to make no compromises as far as time and distance were concerned. My only desire was to immerse myself in the most beautiful scenery I could find and let my daydreams provide me company. Sometimes solitude can provide the most lucid looking glass and hypnotize with the most inspiring conversation.

The day I left Portland, Red showed up at my house in his truck early in the morning, and we departed on our drive to San Francisco. Just outside of Eugene, we stopped for two hitchhikers who were also heading to San Francisco. I opted to move into the covered bed of the truck to get some sleep, and for the next eight hours I laid on a carpeted panel about a foot in width, sharing the bed with the hitchhikers' large packs, along with Red's and my own, the hitchhikers' dog, and my bicycle, all beneath a creaking shell whose complete disintegration was being prevented somehow by only two fraying bungee cords. Traveling at its punkest!

wherever it was they were headed. That's all the town had ever been to me before. Now, for the next few days, it would be home.

In life, all conclusions are subject to change.

We carry with us constantly the illusion of control. We construct costumes for every occasion, acknowledging no limits as to the intricacy and excesses of our shields, our armor. In nature there are no masks.

I ride my bike not to escape reality, but to see it more clearly.

To wander to the fringes of the discovered world, to where the known and familiar give way to the foreign, the unsubdued, is to come upon a new geography where thought occurs in colors rather than words. Language fails here, as the mind ventures beyond the realm of literacy, beyond the noose of the symbolic.

Here one is governed by the senses, statues being only complicated and abstract.

Majestic pebbles, remnants of time gone by.

Within this world, we have only the present.

Tonight I lay down, my armor broken, my mouth tasting of blood. I have no money, no means of transportation. This is where life begins. Tomorrow, the sun will rise, on this bench I'll awake, possessing only a blank canvas, in abandon to the new day.

My head hit the solid surface of the highway. A quick grunt forced its way from my gut. Within an instant a tornado of motion went to stillness.

The sky was a boundless blue. Tranquil now. My body felt weightless, gravity had disappeared. The ocean ran ashore in long gentle waves. The sun making its way toward slumber following a full day. The clocks did not chime, time was as still as the air.

I jumped up and ran to my bike which lay on its side about eight feet away from me. The front wheel wouldn't turn. I carried the bike to an area off of the road.

Blood ran down my leg and arm. My hip pulsed. I wiped the gravel from my back through the fresh tear in my shirt. Adrenaline blurred the pain which I could already feel with each movement. The front fork and wheel of my bike had been twisted beyond repair upon impact with the guardrail after it slid out from beneath me.

I could feel that perfect sky, now, compressed against my chest, pushing harder with each passing instant. In a moment, the weightlessness shattered, and I now had to force each of my limbs into motion, as if I was bound in a pool of water. My bike lay on the shoulder of the road, broken. I stood next to it, my condition an equal state of hopelessness. The weight on my chest now at asphyxiating proportions, like the weight of the dropping red curtain following a flawed performance. The red curtain had descended on me now. I could see it. It covered nearly the whole left side of my body.

I walked along the stream to the ocean. The sun had set, the western horizon sat in dreary twilight, in wait for the darkness of the east to catch up to it. I walked slowly, with a limp. It was painful to sit down.

The ocean washed the pebbles of the beach back and forth. Each wave rushing over the stones like a storm, the soothing sound of a gentle violence, then meandering back out through the new topography. Behind me, cars drove along the highway, the town of San Simeon nothing but a line of motels and diners en route to

I decided that if I was going to be at the Bookfair, I could make some traveling money by selling books. So on subsequent trips to the chain bookstores in Portland, I looted enough books to fill up a large box, all of which I would sell for only a couple dollars. I brought with me everything from books about the negative impacts of technology to histories of the Black Panther Party to Jeanette Winterson novels. One Barnes and Noble store even had the audacity to stock Abbie Hoffman's Steal The Book... with not so much as even an alarm tag. I found the situation so ironically inviting that I walked out with two.

We dropped off the hitchhikers in Oakland and continued into the Mission in San Francisco for some burritos. Here I unpacked my bike and Red and I split off. Eventually I made my way to the Presidio to look for a spot to sleep.

The Presidio is a place of romantic and comforting familiarity to me. I could recount all the details of my previous visits there, the way one can remember the most trivial details of a visit to the home of a distant friend who one sees only occasionally. I can remember the way the trees enveloped the dirt paths that I've ridden down in search of a place to sleep, and the way the sun rose and sprinkled down in thin rays through the gaps in the intermingling branches and leaves that canopied my patch of ground, and the chirpy whistling of some radio song that I couldn't quite identify. I remember a guy who walked the path alone in the morning unaware of our presence just up a slope from him. So beautiful this area is, with pockets of quiet dorm-style, and streets that see more traffic from joggers and bicyclists enjoying the winding hills and colorful flora than of cars. Roadside signs warn drivers to watch out for quail, but I saw only hummingbird and skunks, both within several feet of me. One was quite pleasant, but the other quite potentially disastrous. Though the combination of each being one of the reasons why when I'm in a city that so many people talk on about the culture of, I prefer to spend my time in this area, which does have its own history, but nothing so appealing as the views of the ocean and the bay that it offers.

The Bookfair was to be held in a gymnasium at the edge of Golden Gate Park, and inside were spread rows and rows of tables offering books, pamphlets, movies... every degree of radicalism laid out in every medium. And in between all these tables were seemingly every person involved with any type of radical project on the west coast, with a healthy number of kids passing through town, living from a backpack and a practiced panhandling line.

I took the end of a table from a prisoner-solidarity group I'm involved with in Portland and put up a sign of my own, 'BOOKS FROM THE CHAINSTORE TO YOU AT OUR SPECIAL SALE PRICE,' scribbled on a piece of cardboard and propped up by the stack of books I brought to sell.

Outside, the fog had become so dense that the leaves on the trees standing over the patio would let fall droplets of the accumulated moisture. Somehow in the course of transporting my bike to San Francisco I had broken two spokes on the back wheel, so I took my bike to a shop right across the street from the gym. In my journal I had written... 'I wonder if two broken spokes amounting to \$15 in repairs before my trip really even begins is to be accurate foreshadowing.' Ha! Remember that line...

An abridged history of my life could be found in that gym. A friend whom I started a band with back in high school, spending our afternoons playing Nausea covers and our evenings walking the streets of Long Beach, these being the days when I could talk endlessly of music and politics, the naiveté of living with my parents permitting me the luxury of knowing and caring about little else. Another friend who I traveled the country with the summer after I left high school, the one who stood with my at daybreak on a rooftop in Seattle on the verge of being stormed by a riot police, and who was there when one of our friends, one morning, walked out of a store in San Diego with a keg of German beer which we took and drank over the course of the day on the beach. Others with whom our paths have crossed everywhere from the forests of Ohio to the small towns of Massachusetts to the trimyards of Oregon.

Nearly every piece of anarchist literature has one central theme... liberation. In an Anarchist Bookfair, banners and books

The setting sun paints both the sky and sea orange. A warm orange. Entrancing orange. Big Sur is a garden of abundance, its borders set by the clouds and the sea. Here is a geography in constant flux, a fringe of the world in motion. On these shores, civilization struggles to exist. Out here there is no sound beyond that of the ocean. The endless sky and landscapes, which extend in a springtime richness reflect the mind's ideal of Eden. Lush hills roll on endlessly, an earthly rendition of the ocean which lies at its side. Here, life is primitive, slow. Here lies the end of land. Inside this garden wander no conquerors. The mountainsides too steep, too prone to the violent storms which sculpt and resculpt the landscape endlessly. The hills lie at the mercy of the waves and fog which often settle on the land like a blanket, and vestal mountains and meadows fall into shores paved with jade.

I ride my bike not to escape reality, but to see it more clearly. I ride my bike because I have always envied the freedom of runaway horses.

At the ocean's edge, the lessons of the city unravel.

The biggest fault of a book is that the story's conclusions sit written in the final chapter, set in ink, unalterable. In life, all conclusions are subject to change.

With the sword came combat, capable of altering the direction of the future. With the pen came linearity, capable of altering the direction of the past. In this world we have only the present.

My elbow throbbed with each heartbeat that forced blood through, and my leg was veiled in crimson and gravel.

...a single unpredictable moment...

Downhill. Afternoon tread on the cusp of evening. Blind curve. The rolling hills of San Luis Obispo lay before me now, the most tense portion of my ride now sat behind. Loose gravel. Slide.

The city of Manhattan was built on a landfill. Venice was constructed of the sea. The crystal desert of Antarctica, today, bears the flags of 18 nations.

In the grass beside me a deer feeds, undisturbed by my presence. Lifting its head for a look at me, then carrying on. In the coves beneath me, harbor seals splash in the water and sleep on the rocks. Pups lie on the shore, nestled tightly next to a mother. Their size so small that their weight itself is not enough to anchor them to the sand, and each wave that rolls by pushes their bodies up, then pulls it back out in the direction of the sea.

Man likes to separate himself from the animal kingdom. 'Don't touch that, you'll get warts.' 'Don't go near that, you'll get rabies.' A picket-fence protects us from the uncivilized, a pane of glass keeps us from the wilderness. But is it the world's abundance which is confined by our armor?

A mouse will learn to run a maze for a slice of cheese. What lies beyond the walls is not important, for the mouse sees only a task and a reward. The mouse can learn to spend its life running mazes, as long as a slice of cheese is at the finish. How it lived any other way before is forgotten, lost in the periphery to the task and the reward.

The sun filters through the leaves, showering the ground in millions of beams of light. Then the wind shifts, leaves flutter and fall, and the patterns played by the sun and trees have changed. No one is around now but me. This piece of the world, this moment, is mine alone. The barking of the harbor seals, the breeze across my face. Man can change geographies. These ingenuities are the foundations from which civilization is built. But geographies can also change man. These are the floods which bury civilization.

A mouse will spend its whole life inside the maze, believing in no greater reward than the slice of cheese. Man likes to separate himself from the animal kingdom, but, so far, man is still only heartbeat and appetite.

Is it the world's abundance which is confined by our armor?

and puppets and signs everywhere made some proclamation of this theme. Many of the pamphlets and books use the same terms, repeating words like 'pleasure' and 'dreams' and 'desires' over and over until they lose their romantic meanings and become just another two-dimensional word buried in pages of text. All I could think was that my own dreams don't lie in books or on signs, but in the people whom I can share a connection with. I spent a minimal amount of time at the table and more time catching up with old friends and being introduced to new ones.

That night I rode down Market Street to the BART station which I took to Berkeley, and then rode to Gilman, a punk club in the industrial district. At the doorway the cool and otherwise quiet night air instantly gave way to sweaty bodies packed together in a room whose spraypainted walls reflected the din of amplified guitars and keyboards and the pounding bass drum. Quick bursts of dancing would end with a final blast of guitar, leaving a gap for inaudible conversation with the person next to you, then launch back into another burst of noise. In a scene where sound quality always comes second to sheer energy, and in a room where any combination of substances and sounds combined to create an atmosphere that few other places can contain as well as this, an intoxication of energy and discordant rhythm embracing you, peaking, and then turning you out to the street afterwards, with ringing ears and a lust to take the dreary buildings and empty streets around you and turn them into props in a world of moonlit mischief and adrenaline highs.

From the club, several of us walked to the Landfill. This is a landscape which could only happen in Berkeley. A piece of land nearly surrounded by the bay, connected to the land by only a pair of access paths. This is where the wreckage of a past earthquake goes to live out the remainder of its half-lives. Where small shrubs grow out of rebar jungles and vice versa. Where the locals have gone through a tremendous amount of work to add to the decay solely for the sake of aesthetics. The landfill is where a fifteen minute walk down a rocky, uneven dirt trail will take you to a spot where the brush opens up and a person sits on the rocky shore looking out on the panoramic view the bay, playing a tuba... very loudly and very badly.

We walked off the trail and into a clearing, a large grassy area enclosed by the brush and cement, that contained a cathedral of sculptures welded from old bicycle parts, and a firepit in the middle. A cool damp breeze blew over us and the rolling fog reflected the lights of the otherwise invisible cities around us. To the north were two blinking red lights, the flashing crowns of twin radio towers. In every other direction shown only the silhouettes of branches, shrubs, and intricate sculptures, in varying shades of black underneath a lustrous gray sky.

We sat down, our neglect of bringing any firewood with us placing us as shadows in each others' vision. In these shadows flowed a conversation amongst strangers - stories of past train rides, books, ugly states and beautiful states of mind, an anonymous intimacy of thoughts, made a little less viscous by the bottle of stolen wine being shared. Our seclusion left us in an environment devoid of any sounds or pictures other than that of each others' creation, images painted with words and stories, and enhanced by the whispers of the midnight wind, where the rest of the world falls to pieces beneath the weight of its own gravity. Gravity is what we were defying. Those forces that pull objects from atmospheres and place them, neat and orderly. That which grips the wandering imaginations of youth, anchoring them with ideas of security and place. But we know that the systems which they build up will continue to exist at the mercy of the earthquakes and wildfires, the wild elements that will never be subdued. Those elements pump through our blood. And beneath that blinding sky, I glimpsed the fountain of youth, and found that it exists in the journey, not the destination.

Daybreak... I let me eyes adjust to the morning light and wiped the grass and gravel from my hair. The sky was cloudless, the droplets of moisture on the grass around me beamed with a shine of crystal, small yellow flowers danced back and forth on their tall slender stalks. What was only a couple of us when I closed my eyes had become about fifteen when I opened them. The ground was covered with what looked like a chaotic nest of cocoons, sleeping bags laid out in every direction, leather boots and worn packs dotted the ground and a morning-after trail of smoke rose from the crackling firepit.

comfort. All answers are ephemeral fictions, rewritten with the changing of the wind. The truth leads only to a cell.

The most valuable lessons are those that are written on the body. The merging of emotions, choices, histories, all contained within the scars that mark the skin, each one holding volumes of tears, lust, chance and excitement. Each one holding a story that will be taken to the deathbed, where stories are the only thing you've got.

In this life you have to be your own teacher.

With the restlessness of runaway slaves. Never forgetting the pleasure and intensity that exists in a broken window, in rain on a sunny day, in the electricity of a touch, never forgetting that there is no authority but yourself.

The towers sit still, relics of the changing seasons.
Strike the match.
Now fucking run!

In a different season the crests would remain beyond reach, isolated by muddy paths and icy slopes, hidden behind a veil of fog. In a different season the flawless white beaches of Carmel would stare back at this rock, the water empty of surfers and the sands empty of sunbathers. Butterflies would fill the air, returning to the Monterey Peninsula from their summer migration to the tropics. In a different season the sky would not be a perfect blue, a glimpse into heaven rare in these parts no matter what the time of year. But now is tourist season, and Point Lobos is filled with kayakers on the water and picnickers on the shores. Photographers leaning over the cliffs, trying to shoot the next April image for next year's 'Scenes of California' calendar, and painters sitting on boulders, capturing the collision of sea and rock in watercolor.

The barking of the harbor seals carries past me, floating in the gusts of wind. I walk along the edges of rocks, passing through meadows and wrapping around the forking roots of aging trees. Beneath me are coves with water so clear that one would suffocate if they were to plant their feet at the depth where visibility blurs.

dimension beyond reach of the senses, accessible only through the plane of complete surrender.

I awoke on the floor of an abandoned cannery overlooking the bay. The sky was overcast and cool. I rode my bike to the villa balcony with the bottle of wine I had stolen the night before. The morning had the magnificence of the bay, but the ocean's clarity was still astounding. Sea otters drifted amongst the kelp and gulls skimmed the water's surface in search of a morning meal. After a time passed, I re-corked the bottle and set it down on the small table next to my chair, a gift for another lucky wanderer.

In this life you have to be your own teacher.

The first lesson taught inside the classroom or the temple is that the answers are already determined and held by another, stone in the hands of royalty. But in this life, even stone will crumble into entirely new geographies, forcing the maps to be redrawn, the histories to be rewritten.

I chose a bicycle because there was no windscreen keeping me inside a comfortable compartment, where music distracts from the solitude and the temperature is controlled to the degree. My movement rested upon the effort I made, and each hill and shoulderless stretch kept bringing back the question of my sanity. I chose a bicycle because in terms of speed, comfort and efficiency it was the antithesis of everything I had been taught.

The heart beats over one hundred thousand times a day, 38 million beats a year, 2.5 billion a lifetime, not resting until death. A star burns for millions of years until it burns itself out, fading from existence, its place in the heavens taken by other starbursts.

An absolutist looks at the sun and sees only night. An absolutist looks in the mirror and can see only death.

In this life the most that can be offered is the looming shadow of uncertainty. (beyond this life, even less.) To labor away the here, the now, to postpone the prospect of discovery, of pleasure, of risk, is to forfeit those heartbeats forever. The beast wields not only the threat of harm in its armory, but also that of

Outside of the landfill, I parted ways with everyone. This morning I would leave to ride down the coast. I took the BART train to the Mission, swerved through the traffic and criss-crossed the hills of San Francisco, with the sun shining, my bike working, and my eyes set to the sea.

First, though, I wanted to fulfill one more goal in this city. Twice now I've explored San Francisco with the intent of finding the house used in the opening credits and exterior shots of the TV show, Full House. The prime years of my youth were in the 80's, and after afternoons of playing with fireworks and throwing water balloons at the ice cream trucks which circled my neighborhood, I'd retire to my home in the evening for microwave hamburgers, pre-algebra homework, and re-runs of Danny Tanner, Kimmy Gibbler and The DeeJ. On my first search for the house, I really didn't know where to look. On my second search I was given bad directions. But this time I knew exactly where it was, and I rode my bike up to the park and saw the house, one in a row of about six Victorians with a sweeping view of the financial district behind it. I ran up the stairs and onto the porch and took a picture of myself in front of the Full House door. Success! Off to Highway 1.

When I was younger, I used to climb out of my bedroom window at night. My parents asked me why I had taken the screen off the window. I told them that when I couldn't sleep I would sit and look at the stars. This wasn't entirely untrue, though I didn't mention that I was sitting in the park of a nearby school with my 'girlfriend' - or whatever you are in 8th grade. Midnight cast a thrilling hue on the city streets, and we'd walk in the fringes of the lights, treading the line between shadow and night, speaking quietly but feigning fearlessness, all the while blushing and on the verge of buoyant laughter with our nervous excitement. We wanted to be grown up, at an age where we could walk the streets, or even drive, making the night our own without worrying about curfew violations and angry parents. We were children wanting to play adult games, believing that adult games were similar to our own. But whereas children's games are about imagination and are played on a field with no conceivable boundaries, adult games are formulaic and confined by many walls which stand beyond a child's vision.

This all ended one night when the tapping on my window awoke my parents but not me. They told me they walked to the window to see a couple kids running away. The screen went back up on the window, but I had already had my taste. Of places where I wasn't supposed to go, and grassy fields and starry skies and passing train whistles in the distance, and discovering an intimacy I was told I was too young for. And only very rarely since that time have I had a similar feeling that the nighttime city belonged to me... to us.

I rode south, passing through Daly City. I turned off the highway and cut through a residential area. South of Daly City is a town whose name I never even caught. I continued through this town, riding along a street that paralleled Highway 1, just before joining back up with the highway. I saw a gate with a path behind it leading to the beach. I pushed my bike around the gate and then rode to the shore. When I got near the ocean's edge, the beauty of this area struck me. To the left was a cliff, and at the water, the cliff had been broken into a natural tunnel, with each wave gliding through, crashing against the sides and sending a small splash into the air. To my right side was a drainage pipe, held in the air by beams and planks extending out of the sand. At one time, it looked as if this pipe was the overflow outlet for the small neighborhood separated from the shore by a marshy overgrown field. Now this pipe was not connected to anything, as the visible section lay severed from it's beginning and end, and what had not already collapsed altogether sat in a wretched state of decay. Beyond function and left, seemingly, only to save the city the trouble of having to haul its wreckage away.

Beyond the pipe, the shoreline stretched in a gentle crescent bend, disappearing into the cliffs of Daly City which I had rode over earlier. People walked the length of the shoreline, some in pairs, some alone.

What stood out the most about this area was the water. The rough ocean, uneven in its colliding waves which stretched out to the horizon. It had a sheen to it which isn't there along other parts of this coastline. Porcelain white crests of crashing waves bounced off of the cliffs and rocks and through the natural tunnel. Closer to the shore, the water took on a coral blue hue. It had a

turquoise bay. The detail of this city was dazzling on the eyes, and I searched even the furthest corners to see what they possessed.

The mind can take intoxicating substances in small doses and maintain a feeling of normalcy. Here I found I never stood a chance. The warmth of the sun upon closed eyelids, the illumination of the white tile balcony upon which was a hot tub, bathing me in light and liquid. The brick walkways that weave beneath immaculate Spanish architecture, patios flanked by white arches. A coastal path filled with women in warm evening dresses, children eating ice cream in the oceanfront plazas, and people posing for photographs before a background of waves washing up on the tidepools. I searched for an environment which could give me the feeling of a different reality, a world apart from what I was used to. I found that in Monterey, I was quite simply overwhelmed.

Monterey is a city of turquoise, emerald waters at the base of lush hills. White-masted boats line the harbor as pink and white pastel homes stretch into the hills. This city is an earthly paradise and there is no sense of modesty about this. The canneries which the city celebrates are interspersed with luxury hotels standing high above the waters. Where a more modest city would keep their history contained in its library, Monterey puts its history on display everywhere. I find it hard to walk at some places without stumbling over a plaque commemorating this dead figure or that. Dignitaries, cannery owners, writers. People who would be forgotten in other towns, here, have their likenesses displayed in bronze. Historical markers wait at the most unassuming corners and tell the tales of the most unexpected objects. Downtown is a place of brick patios and courtyards, gently sloping streets and winding pedestrian paths. Further from downtown, the streets stray from a grid, and curves and dead-ends appear. Intersections mark the meetings of three roads rather than four. Kiosks map out an official historic route, where the bulk of the tourists remain, but away from this route the streets become more tranquil, while not losing the qualities of beauty of the more populated quarters. I wander this city with a gleam in my eye. A city which pulls of that which others try to be, and then openly congratulates itself. My time here was an existence within a travel and leisure magazine, spoiled rotten by a perfect merging of elements and environment, by accessible hot tubs and evening courtyards, by a coastline which begins on an emerald cove and could be traced to a beautiful infinity, stretching to a

I stole from corporations. I slept on beaches, rooftops and strangers' floors and beds. I wandered aimlessly with no money, showing myself that economic security was not needed to live luxuriously. I saw my reflection in shattered glass, and ran quickly into the night as security alarms and police sirens filled the air. I rode my bike 1700 miles on a whim. I danced in living rooms and in the light of bonfires. I stopped consuming animal byproducts. I learned that the thought of me knowing the solutions to everyone else's ills is as farcical as anyone believing they know the solution to mine. I scaled the barbed wire fences and crept beneath the NO TRESPASSING signs. I tasted the intoxication of wines and chemicals, though I've also found that a foreign beach, or an old friend, or a leap from an 80 foot bridge can give you the same highs. What I learned is that following the map is the surest route to becoming lost.

I discovered the potential of my own senses in the forest, my capacity for fear and determination in the faces of riot police, the practices of economics walking past those asleep in city streets and alongside clearcut stretches of rural highways. I learned of boundaries and power and inertia. I touched the features which others know only as geology, and learned from people who others experience only as 'cultural studies.' I learned more in the first several months following my schooling than I had learned in the entire time of having gone. Books hold figures and theories, but it was traveling across the country which gave me tears, bruises, and the first grasp of the world outside of my own. There were no longer any controlled factors, and the conclusion wasn't contained in a book on the teacher's desk.

The black and white of years of text gave way to the color of the world beyond the walls, to the scent of the fresh air after a rainstorm, the sight of the diversity of life around me, the taste of another's body. I recognized that the only differences between 'domestication', 'subordination', and 'slavery' are lyrical.

In Monterey, I walked. Through a city that seemed to blend perfectly daylight and breeze, vista and warmth. Decaying canneries sit on display beneath a cool sun, and otters play along the

radiance which boasted of a purity unfamiliar to the more developed areas of the California coast. At greater depths the water took on a more teal shade, but still a brilliant glow, showing no glare from the sun in the pastel blue sky.

Throughout the day, my mind had been playing with, for lack of a more fitting term, mortality. Remnants of civilization lay everywhere. Like the beachfront parking lot I passed which had collapsed into the water, or that drainage pipe sitting in half-ruin, slowly awaiting its complete disappearance. Invincibility never lasts. I was coming from an anarchist conference where people watched the clock, coming and going in accordance with the itinerary. Talking about a revolution that no two people would even see similarly. This all struck me as... unnecessary? Maybe it's just my own revolution, but it seems silly to try to combat order with order. Empires crumble. Evidence of this surrounds me. It's not empires that I'm interested in.

I began to ride back out toward the highway, but pulled aside when I saw a trail leading to the top of the bluffs which dropped into the sea. I climbed and climbed, out onto a single bluff which extended further out than its surroundings, and from its peak I could look out at the amazing swirls of color, the coral opaque quality, the water in all its motion below me. A sense of vertigo, as if the ground below me was pushing and pulling in every direction, a frantic disorder of movement, while I remained still, standing amidst a bed of small golden poppies. The bluff came to an end, at which point it fell straight down into the craggy configurations below. These rocks, covered and uncovered with the pushing and declining of the tide, probably stood at my level at one time. The poppies of years ago, related to be but separated by generations from those that I currently stood amongst, probably once grew from these stones. Now these rocks provide shelter for shells and sea creatures.

I walked further along the bluffs. As I came around the corner a shower of colors engulfed me. At a distance below I could see a cove of the coral green waters rushing up and retreating from the immaculate soft beige sand, vestal at its untouchable depths. Concealed from me before by the slope of the bluff were the pockets of the cliffs covered with a different bloom, one which opened into millions of tiny purple blossoms, and whose branches, tiny, numerous and complex, resembling I can only think, the

overlapping network of blood vessels inside the whites of the human eye, look on a violet tone when bare. On the other side of the trail from these plants was a slope thick of green clover and complimented with patches of yellow flowers. The trail sloped down, then up the face of another great bluff, I could hear only the ocean and see nothing beyond these bluffs but the sky.

Beside me on this path were the remains of what used to be a thick wall. Huge cement blocks, they now lay overturned, cracked and covered in spraypaint. They led to the bottom of the trail I was on, where a cement foundation for a building lay crumbled, covered in weeds and small stones. A rusted drain pipe, thick and very heavy looking, lay severed. Time had filled it with mud and left it crooked in a gap of dirt, surrounded by a dozen crevices of which the land had created itself for drainage. Behind me was the only stranding structure, three cement walls, roofless and doorless, composing an enclosure of about six feet in both length and width. The neighborhood painters had gotten to this as well. Each slab had been painted a solid color with spraypaint pieces done on top. On one slab was a blue background on which was painted a tree, the flowing wisps of shape, coupled with the absence of straight lines or rough edges gave the tree a fairy-like quality. On the opposite slab were the words 'NATURE DESTROY MAN...' in gold paint. At this range I could see that these walls were, too, on the verge of collapse. Large spiderweb cracks streaked across, and the back slab was folding in a V shape.

I walked away, up toward the face of the tallest bluff. I scaled not so much a footpath but a dirt slope with holds carved out by past water drainage. As I neared the top, a barbed wire fence ran along the path. A fence which looked pathetic with age and rust, its uselessness guaranteed by its remoteness. I crossed it and soon found myself at the peak of the area. I saw the length of the shoreline in both directions, the town I had just come from, the ruins I had just explored. I could see my bike where I had left it, a speck against a background of eternity.

I slowly walked back down to it, and rode off, southbound, until those bluffs were only a speck, then, finally, they disappeared for good.

loot alcohol, to the drive-in theater (that still shows movies!) where we simply rode past the entrance booth, to the free-radio station where we played all the new wave records we could come up with, to the house-show where the entire livingroom pulsed with the energy of the hardcore band and the dancing of everyone packed in so tightly that inhibitions disappeared with any trace of personal space. After all of this, I would find myself walking the silent trails of the forest in the darkness, or find myself in another stranger's house, putting off sleep so that we could talk into the night, careless about our responsibilities and our guts, careless about tomorrow.

Long smooth slopes lead out of Santa Cruz. Beyond city limits, hills and trees fade into flat farmlands. Crimson soil rolls into the crystal bay, and the smells of nearby crops contend for dominance. Strawberries, artichokes, and mushrooms all grow only feet from the side of the road. As Monterey becomes visible I turn off the highway and onto an otherwise empty bicycle path. Fields are replaced by sand dunes. I pass the ghost-town remains of the Ord Military Installation, following the bicycle path past Fisherman's Wharf and into Cannery Row.

The fish canneries which once lined the coast are now tourist shops, each selling similar trinkets, t-shirts, and seafood dinners. Among the pastels sit several authentic ruins - stone structures crumbling into the golden sand, metal canisters which sit rotting in grass-filled lots. People fill the streets and plazas of the city. People who all appear to be tourists, as even those who appear fashionable and wealthy seem neither fashionable nor wealthy enough to belong to such a picturesque city.

It is the coast to which belongs the most allure of this area. Crystal clarity in emerald hues. Every hidden corner reveals a new pocket of life, so numerous that each family exploring the tidepools has the run of their own private cove, with more than a few left over. Harbor seals rest on rocks just off the shore, playing so close you can nearly reach out and touch them. Great beads of kelp poke at the surface of the bay, rolling with the currents of the tide, providing a resting spot for napping sea otters. Tidal life clings to the rocks and coves in displays of radiant magnificence.

some of their 'neighbors,' including one guy who lived with a generator and could be heard yelling at the football games on TV, and whose place, they said, was filled with empty beer cans. And this is in a redwood forest. Blue invited us to her tent for breakfast. She gave directions to Emerson, which sounded something like 'walk along the trail until you see the big fallen tree, then go left until there are two sticks in the shape of an X, then its three big paces until you come to an arched log...' We followed her to her home - a large dome tent nestled between thick patches of trees and brush, and covered in camouflage netting.

I was told that if the university police find your structure, they'll tear it down. Once a year, they conduct sweeps of the forest to search for such camps.

Blue's tent had the luxuries of any furnished living space - a mattress and blankets, an area for her campstove, dishes and silverware, a large trunk to keep food in, a clothesline strung along one side to hang her clothes on, and an area for shoes and jackets, and one still did not feel cramped inside. Outside, she had set up an area for washing dishes, constructed a make-shift shower, and had a compost pile.

Outside the morning was cool, inside the air was warm, filled with the smell of coffee and potatoes being prepared on a campstove. I felt like a child, living in my dreams of forest hideaways and treehouses, a secret life detached from the world of mundane responsibilities, where I could watch the stars come out each night from the top of a tree, and fall asleep to the caresses of the wind.

Santa Cruz is a city where reality fades to a dizzying senselessness. The morning sun illuminated the redwood forest surrounding me, a bike ride down a long winding hill would bring me to the coast where carnival rides and game booths stretched along the sand and the air was filled with tinny music radiating from the carousel. Emerson's stolen key granted us entrance to a private swimming pool and adjoining dinner buffet, a moment of knowing glances and pushed luck got us into the line for the roller coaster on the beachfront boardwalk, the neon lights of downtown made up the backdrop to our cross-town bike rides - to the grocery store to

It grew from a relationship that was never supposed to happen. She was another phone number from our nights of conquests. Though, I admit, she was different from the beginning. I was beginning to feel that I needed to slow down a bit, and she was the fast-paced girl who I felt I could do this with. Our days were spent in the sand in Laguna Beach and our nights hidden in one of the rooms of her parents' massive house watching *Pretty In Pink* or driving along the skyline avenues of the Tustin Hills. I had decided to take a break from the drinking and the parties. She was my first relationship which had lasted longer than a couple months. I always told her that I used to be cool but that she had turned me stupid. I told her I didn't want our emotional relationship to become that serious. I told myself that I could run recklessly along a surface of spiderwebs and not become caught up. It wasn't until later that I realized that when I told her that she had made me a wuss, that this comment meant a lot more than simply meaning me walking away from the whole party lifestyle.

We never believed in our own invincibility. If anything, it was the inevitable ending which made our time together all the more urgent and encapsulating. When it was over, all the songs on the radio seemed to make sense to me for the first time. They say that a candle burns the brightest just before it goes out. In our case, it burned bright until the end, when it fizzled but never seemed to die out. I feared the vulnerability and asphyxiation, but from her I learned that you can't have a flame and a safe supply of oxygen. I spent our time together telling myself that I wouldn't allow myself to suffocate, but the truth was that she had already taken my breath away.

I rode by a Safeway, and walked inside. Juice, baked tofu, olives, all placed neatly in rows in their proper sections. The products of fruits and vegetables which once covered the planet, growing wildly, freely. Each indigenous and unique to its own climates and regions. Each, at one time, picked fresh by the hands of people who would roam through these regions, who also lived wildly, who did not communicate with a written language, but could read the stars and the sun and see in them the story of the universe, and could tell this story to each other, could pass on this knowledge generation to generation without speaking a single word, but could

communicate amounts of information in only a few nights which we could hardly imagine grasping over the course of a lifetime.

Now these plants grow in perfect rows. Subdued, domesticated, taken from the wild and planted orderly, subservient to man's desire for efficiency. But now that the process has been complete, one can see that in domesticating wild plants, man has also placed the manacles around himself, being forced to tend to the plants, creating capital from abundance and routine from timelessness.

In time, man forgot the stories of the stars, forgot how to express himself fully, and learned only how to push buttons and punch a time-clock. I picked up the olives, sealed inside of a glass jar, picked prematurely in order to maximize production, processed through machines, packed tightly into a container with no room for movement or breath, marked with an expiration date, and finally with a price tag. I discreetly dropped the jar into my pocket. I had no intention of paying.

In this area, mountain ranges touch the ocean not at a gradual slope, but at the point where the waves force entire sections of the mountainside to collapse into the water. South of Pacifica, I had to ride up a steep winding two-lane road with no shoulder. In minutes I had ascended from riding along the water's edge to hovering hundreds of feet above it. This area was called the Devil's Slide, an area frequently closed to traffic due to rockslides. Riding a bicycle carrying the weight of my food and sleeping bag through this area was tense, especially because the road often lacked a shoulder, which at some points had fallen into the water (at some points, the road lacked portions of the traffic lanes, which had also fallen into the water), but the sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean were breathtaking, and getting past this area was reason enough to pull over, crack open a bottle of overpriced fruit juice and celebrate.

I passed several towns which had neither a gas station or a grocery store. Towns that gave the feeling of a slow, modest pace of life, of homes with wooden fences in need of repair and small churches advertised only with hand-painted wooden signs put out

compartmentalized movements - existence within the boundaries of four walls, confined by the safety of locked doors and closed windows, their actions set by an externalized timer. While the seasons change, while the ocean tides rise and fall, while stars shoot across the sky, while potential friends and lovers pass by, while others talk to their neighbors and travel the world and eat wild mushrooms and set fire to the offices of multi-national corporations - while others struggle to create a space outside the constraints of a mechanized existence, students fill these classrooms and lecture halls, completing the steps from which they will eventually begin their careers. Inanimate, immobile, lifeless. I looked at the building, the walls impermeable to the fragrant songs of the birds and the moisture of the air. I thought of the wind which blew past me up on this platform, carrying the scent of the forest, of richness and diversity, carrying spores which will create new life, carrying a history, blowing the seeds of a beautiful perfect lawlessness, blowing this through the trees, around the cascading hills, along the bends in the landscape, and up to the building where it hits a wall, where it is stopped by windows tightly shut, on the other side of which sits a classroom of students looking at the pages of a textbook, and falls to the ground.

I lay down in my sleeping bag and let my thoughts stray away from the cupola and the students. School has consumed too many of my thoughts over the last twenty years already. I close my eyes and lay in an evening silence broken only by the rustling of the tarp roof.

Daybreak... Suspended in the air, I stood at the edge of the platform. The sky, thick with clouds, stretched seemingly as infinitely as the trees around me. Branches level with the platform swayed dizzily in all directions, their detail visible now in this morning's soft light.

While we sat in the platform, two shrill whistles pierced the air. Emerson looked down and saw Blue looking back up. He invited her up and the three of us sat thirty five feet in the air drinking tea from Emerson's campstove. I had met Blue the night before. She also lived in the forest. Emerson and Blue told me of

I lost my sense of direction in the curves and shortcuts, riding further and further into the unfamiliar, into the electrical disarray of shadows weaving trails amongst one another along waterfront streets. We rode with the restlessness of runaway slaves, finding our paths through the contours of night, a revolt against stagnancy as much as hierarchy. While the city slept, we came to life, breathing in the nighttime air and humming songs that only the stars would hear.

From downtown Santa Cruz we caught the night's last bus to the university. Emerson's home was a platform which sat 35 feet above the ground in the redwood forest just outside of the university. In the darkness, we leaned our bikes against a tree near the road and walked a steep trail to the base of the tree.

Horizontal branches at gradual intervals composed the steps with which we lifted ourselves into the air. The platform rested amongst the crowns of the redwoods, floating with the swaying branches in this silent forest.

The platform itself was spacious and well-furnished. On one end was a table on which were candles, lanterns, a campstove, and a supply of water. Next to the table was a couch. Breathless from the steep trail, it amazes me to even guess how a couch made its way up there.

Redwoods surrounded the platform, and through a small clearing was visible a cupola atop one of the university buildings, bathed in a golden light, it sat alone beneath the nighttime sky. Its stoic solidity a marked contrast to the softness of the dirt which compressed beneath the weight of my step, and to the trees which swayed freely around me. Regardless of rain or wind or sun, it remained inanimate, immobile, lifeless. Regardless of the movement of the world around it, its lights still turned off in the morning. I looked at the building through the shifting of the trees, and thought that it only makes sense for this to be a school. Where people are taught to take on the same traits as the cupola. Where that rain and sun are neglected for the comforts of abstract duties and

front in the morning and brought inside at night. The fluidity of everyday events along this stretch felt much slower, with the exception of the stream of SUV's rushing by four feet away from me along the highway. I turned off onto a small side-road in the town of Montara and rode toward the ocean. When I came upon a beach access trail, I saw that the beach had little room for people to walk or sit, but, rather, was lined with tidepools. Stone crevices stretching into the water sheltered an assortment of creatures, and made up a foundation of arteries for the water which washed forward then back with each passing wave, waves not loud and violent but which also took on the air of serenity that surrounded the rest of the town.

A small creek flowed into the ocean here, and following along the side of the creek from the ocean, I found a trail which led through the lush green banks of the creek and up into an area dense with tall trees that stood bare with the absence of leaves which had still not begun to grow back from the winter. The trees grew so thick that despite the lack of leaves, the path I walked was cool and shady, unexposed to the mid-day sun. This area had a storybook quality to it. If you walked far enough, the forest would end, coming to an abrupt edge, a palisade, and 30 feet below, the sand and waves of the ocean, the sun and infinity of a clear sky, stretching beyond vision, beyond imagination. I felt like the fairy tale child, wandering alone through the forest and stumbling upon the splendors of a new, undiscovered region. Though the dirt trail was well-worn, there was no one around me. I sat down there on the edge. For what does one do when coming to such a place, a small slice of the world where you are quite simply overcome. Where a photograph would take the warmth of the sun, the smell of the ocean, the mist of the crashing surf, a skyline that stretches so far that if you were to ask a young child of its size, they would swing their outstretched arms so far, with open hands and smiling face, that their arms would almost reach the point of composing the shape of a 'V' behind their back, a photograph would take all this and reduce it to a two dimensional image, a representation which could be looked at as nothing more than insulting. How could one even try to write about this in a journal. The magnificence of the physical elements alone could fill a book. Then one would have to begin on the sense of freedom, of discovery, of the wave of feeling that comes from finding yourself wandering aimlessly, all the

worldly possessions of your life being a bicycle and what you could strap onto the back of it, in an unfamiliar region of the country, with sore muscles that still you push further, forcing tired legs to carry you up a path into a sliver of forest, and, finally, walking to a spot overlooking the ocean, the burial ground of civilizations and the body from which new life will emerge. How could one ever try to capture a beauty and freedom which is nothing short of indescribable. But then a photograph or a journal entry would only reinforce the feeling of separation, of commodifying liberty, of taking the breath of life and trying to turn it into a postcard. I wondered the value of living the revolutions of others, or even re-living those of your own past, vicariously. And here, faced with heaven, I was content, not as a spectator or reporter of my surroundings but as part of it, to simply sit down and inhale.

Highway I was less mountainous and more gradual now, the coastline along one side and now farms stretching inland on the other. I came to the town of Princeton, a tiny port town, a town you would miss if you continued on the highway passing the street which looks like a lone secluded off-ramp. The port was bordered on one side by an old fishing pier, whose age gave it a dull quality. In the port were as assortment of aging vessels with modest names like *Tabitha* and *Amber C*, amongst other small boats with names like *the Godfather* and *La Boheme*. At the edge of the parking lot for the port, the town ended and the highway continued south into Half Moon Bay.

I found a secluded area of the beach where the chirps of sea gulls and the rumbling of the waves were the dominant sounds. I laid down and was asleep before it was even dark.

This morning I awoke to the sound of the Pacific Ocean. Fog engulfed the green hills around me, and the misty air felt good on my sunburned face. I walked down to the water, it seemed that most other people in this town were still asleep. On the shore I saw only two other people, one a good distance away from me, sitting lazily in a lawn chair holding a long fishing pole, the other even further away in the other direction walking along the water, bending

can't be bought and sold. Not in terms of monetary worth or hours worked. I remind myself that if I choose to leave, venturing to the end of the farmhouse, make believe gives way to the litter-strewn ground and miserable-looking ticket vendors once more.

Emerson is the friend whose stories I wish were mine. He had a troubling tendency and the ability to charm his way into and out of the most unlikely of situations. I knew him from Portland, where, at the time, he was living in an empty boxcar just outside of the trainyard and sneaking beers to us as we sat outside the backdoor of the cafe he worked at. He was staying in Santa Cruz, and I told him I'd be making my way through.

The sun had melted into the water as I rode along the winding beachfront road of Natural Bridges Drive. I sat in downtown Santa Cruz as dusk and then the deep blue nighttime sky rolled across the heavens. Cities always seem smaller to me at night. When the lights of skylines steal away from the sprawl and denseness of the surrounding area with a feeling of intimacy rather than hurried commuters. At this hour, the commerce of cities is replaced by feelings of romance and seediness. The landscape changes beneath the lights, which go on when the sun sets. Colors appear even more magnificent and a sense of excitement ignites inside of me when half the city falls asleep and the other half come alive in the ambience of nightlife.

That night we rode our bikes, tracing the moonlit shores and sleepy residential hills. In the darkness, we raced up one-way streets and down meandering hills, crossed bridges which stood quiet and still, our path lit by the light of one moon above and another in the shattered mirror that flowed beneath. The neon of storefront signs glittered in the empty streets, and not a single head-or taillight could be seen in either direction. We barreled through the stillness, our voices and laughter thunderous as they echoed from the buildings we rode past, stopping occasionally to fill our stomachs on the excesses of bakeries and the local tofu-manufacturer, or to paint the electrical boxes which sat at street corners, silver and dull, a shade of light which could glow with a warmth of its own amidst its drab surroundings.

subdue. I still see reflections of these events in my own perspectives, the factor often forgotten or left out, but capable of dizzying and dazzling effects. There's something romantic in the unpredictable, the unpreventable, in the power of being able to alter geography, to fracture routine and twist skylines, to alter, in a moment, the entire direction of one's life. A simultaneous act of destruction and creation, an ungovernable disorder, of sapphire skies and a quiet content smile on an otherwise tranquil night.

I pass a produce shack on the side of the road and stop to buy a small basket of fresh strawberries, then I continue until I find a small footpath down to the shore where I can eat them.

Nameless beaches outside of nameless unremarkable towns. This is the motivation behind my bike ride. A hopeless misanthropic, this scenery could captivate me for days.

I sit in the sand, feeling the breeze of salty air, watching the waves approach the shore with growing momentum, then crash at the feet of the gulls and pipers who search the sand for their evening meal. The clouds have broken up and the sky is an endless blue. It becomes so easy to lose track of the difference between reality and artifice. On this beach I feel like I've entered a world on the other side of the fun house mirror. A fairy tale of picturesque settings and fetishized characters. I live the life of a thief, a stowaway, that of the traveler who searches out the geographical and emotional planes that lie beyond the confines of the map. In the world on this side of the stained glass, I carry on the life of a roaming gambler. A soul who is guided by a single incurable vice. Others play cards or throw dice. I've seen the empires and ostentation that gambling can build. My games, however, don't involve dice.

Only when security and comfort are wagered can motion, can revolutions be created.

I see irony in those who scorn this way of life, those who turn around and go to work for a third of their day, giving up their time as if it were not only infinite but unimportant. They'll negotiate with their bosses their limited number of vacation days so that they may be allowed the opportunity to try to pack into a few days that which I live everyday. Such pleasures and experiences

down and reaching into the surf every now and then, reaching for what, I couldn't tell.

The tide was low and the waves quite small. Fog hovered above the surf. I walked a bit of a distance by myself, allowing my eyes to adjust to the new day.

A sense of the sea awakes,
Nudges my gait,
Makes me aware
I may no longer await.

I want to be there
When the wave breaks.

- the inscription of a plaque on a lone telescope at the end of the Cowell Ranch trail.

Cowell Ranch was the day's first interesting beach access point. Just south of Half Moon Bay, it's marked by a small dirt parking lot with a faded wooden sign describing the history of the area - the agriculture of the nearby fields, dominated by artichoke, the rise of the local railroad line and its decline after the construction of the highway. Beyond this sign is a trail that weaves between fields and ends on a cliff, where benches facing both field and ocean sit, along with the lonely telescope. Below the cliff at a distance in the water, but within view of the telescope, was a large flat rock which provided a sunning and nesting area for the harbor seals who swam in the area. And today there were many of them, a worn shade of white, quite inactive at this hour, resting upon the rock. This is the season when they give birth to and raise their pups, the pups that I saw were nestled tightly next to their slumbering parents.

I turned around and walked back up the trail to where I saw a wooden stairway that led down to a small beach. My first impression of this cove was its immaculacy. Nothing seemed out of place, over the course of the night the water had washed away any signs of human contact or wear, the entire cove was edged in a smooth gentle fringe of soft golden silt at the base of flawlessly vertical cliffs. Inside the cliffs were the layers of time in perfect display stretching the length of the cove. The sand within the cove

lay in a gentle slope, arranged and rearranged by the small waves which rolled upon its surface, softly, as if respectful of the delicate beauty and visual flawlessness which it itself had created. Time was impossible to guess, as the sky was hazy and concealed the exact location of the sun. The sun, at that moment, may have soared east or west, either way, the entirety of the heavens were illuminated in perfect equilibrium. Photographers recreate such a light in order to conceal flaws and enunciate the overall blending of features in their subjects. And standing alone in this cove, in dreamy twilight, half-awakeness, and the cool ocean breeze, I can attest to the flawlessness of this scene.

The world swirls around me, continuing in cycles, spring-summer-fall-winter, birth-life-and, eventually, death. It inhales and exhales - the rising and falling of the ocean tides, the blossoming and decaying of wild flowers. I stumble across this beach at a moment in time. A single moment in both its life and mine. I'll walk away, and perhaps neither of us will have been significantly changed. The moment will have passed and our evolutions will progress - I on my bike ride, she on her slow restructuring of continents of land. I at a rabbit's pace, trying to squeeze out every last drop of life from the several decades I am given. Her pace resembles more the tortoise, ever-constant, ever-enduring, though a hundred generations of tortoise will live and die in the time it takes her to edge into these cliffs even six inches further.

I take one more deep breath, then turn and begin up the stairs. My bike waits for me, and I want to make it to Santa Cruz by tonight. If you do the math, that's about eight hours to ride 50 miles.

Tonight the seals will swim her waters in search of food. A couple seagulls may comb her sand for any snails or seaweed which may have washed up. They'll land at her edge and they'll converse with each other about the people each had seen throughout the day. They'll have a chuckle at our mortality - our time and our math and our contraptions - our delusions of grandeur. The seals will swim back to the rocks, their children and nests. The birds will move on too, to search the fields in the cool dusk air before it becomes too dark to do so. And the ocean will breathe a sigh, and then get back to slowly crumbling away civilization as we know it.

There is a certain sense of surrealism growing up in southern California. I grew up amidst an environment of spectacle and disillusion. Of beauty salons and tanning parlors built on top of faultlines, and homeless populations in some of the wealthiest cities in the country whose only possessions are a blanket and a surfboard, of million-dollar mansions which sit in the middle of wildfire-prone canyons. On a clear day you can climb to the tops of the foothills and see several pockets of skyscrapers which make up the different downtown's of this decentralized region. There is no time in a 24-hour city.

I was always fascinated by the natural occurrences in this area which were capable of, in the course of seconds, tearing to pieces the illusions of those who live in an area constructed upon them. Nature had a way of interacting with the unnatural objects surrounding me in a way that was simultaneously startling and sensuous. I remember many instances of fires scorching the valleys and foothills, of winds toppling power lines and traffic signals. I remember flash-floods which put my neighborhood streets beneath a foot and a half of water, earthquakes that collapsed freeways and rockslides that blocked roads.

I picture an elusive jester, I see gods drunk on wine playing jokes on those beneath the heavens who need occasional reminders of their mortality, someone who gives ephemeral transparencies to a population losing track of the line where cinematic and Disneyland fantasies end and where the wilderness of real emotion and real circumstances exists, or primitive creatures in the belly of the earth dancing a dance of reconciliation.

I remember the day that a large area of the foothills caught fire, the smoke painting the sky purple, and everything that day took on a hue of faded red, as if the day took place in an old film reel discolored with age. Another evening, I looked up to see the entire sky flash a brilliant electric green and then return to its quiet deep blue, the cause of this, I found out later, was a trail of lightning striking a streetside electrical box within several blocks from me.

It is the act of becoming comfortable in routine, then having that routine interrupted and broken, comfort and security giving way to an unpredictable surge of adrenaline, of the wild elements which city planners and developers have not been able to